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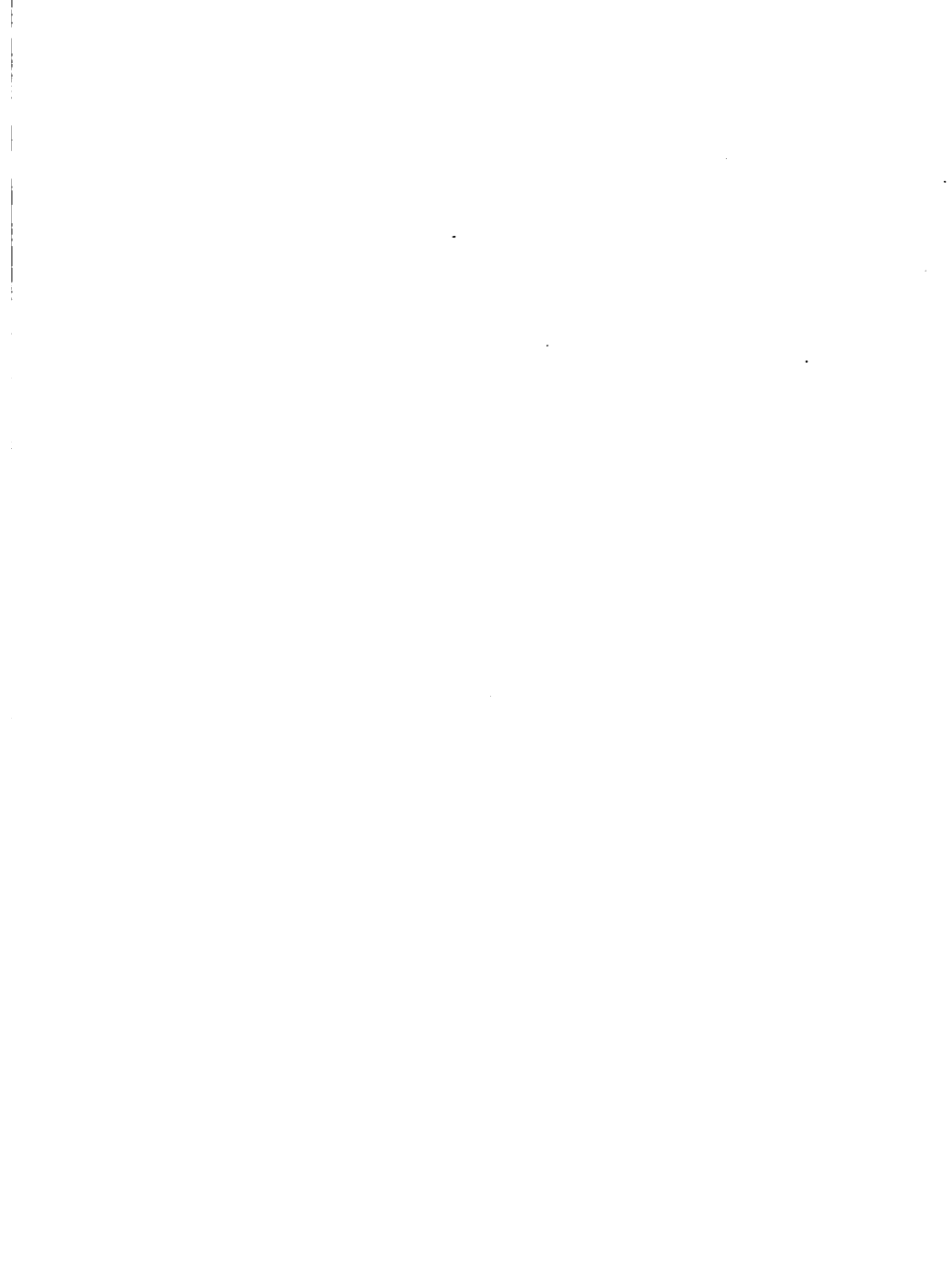
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Fiedler J. 790



With Phyllis' love.

IPHIGENIA
IN
TAURIS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF
WOLFGANG VON GOETHE
INTO ENGLISH BLANK VERSE BY

P. M. E.
Phyllis M. Ellis

Fifty copies printed for private circulation.

1883.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

THOAS, King of Tauris.

IPHIGENIA.

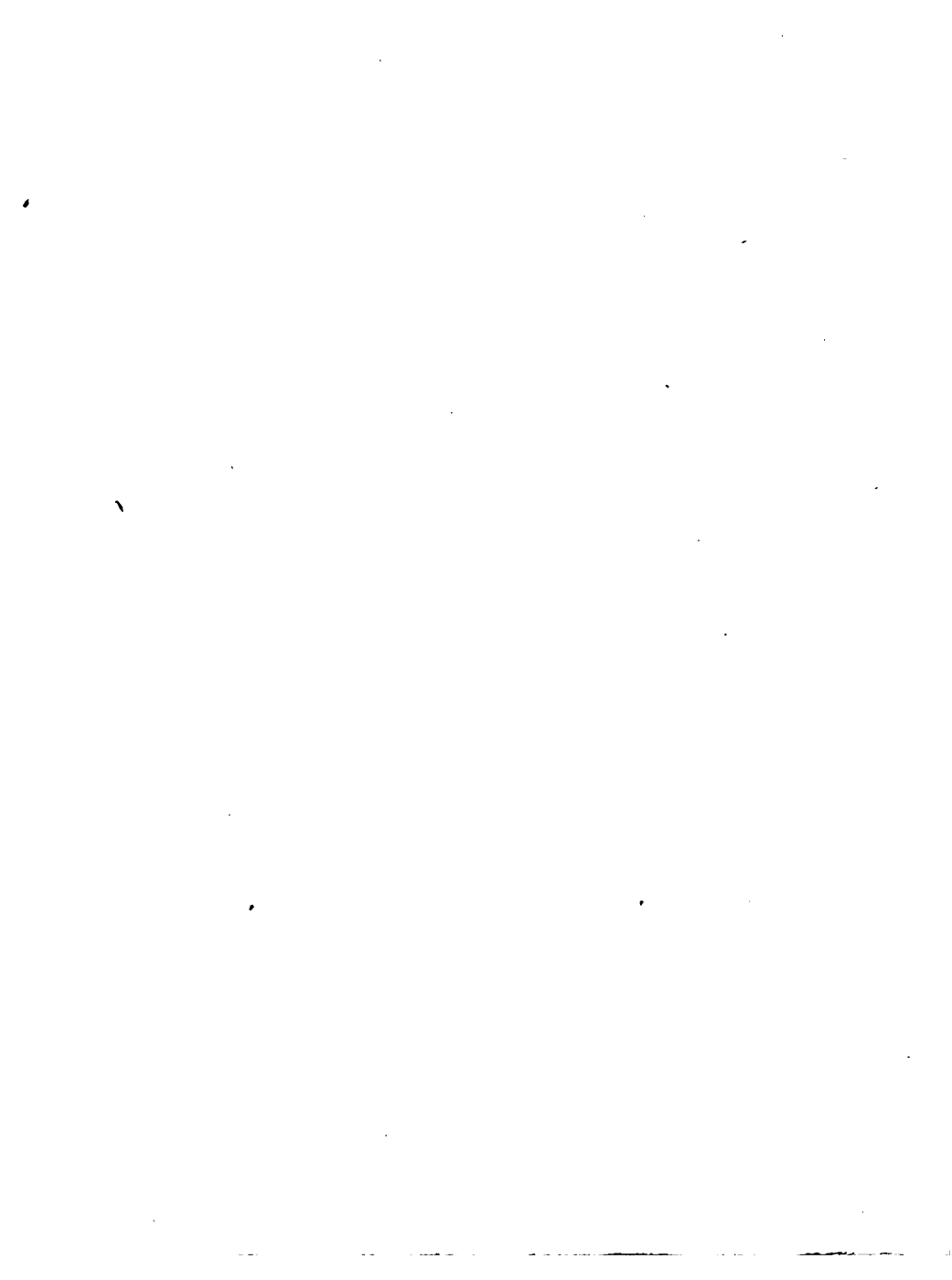
ORESTES.

PYLADES.

ARKAS, Messenger of the King.

SCENE.

The Grove before Diana's Temple.



IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

ARGUMENT.

Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon, King of Mycenæ, having for many years been kept against her will as Priestess in Diana's Temple at Tauris, was at length delivered and brought back to Greece by her brother Orestes and his friend, Pylades, chiefly by means of her own truthfulness.

IPHIGENIA.

HERE in your shadow, waving trees, I tread
The ancient, holy, thickly wooded grove,
Like as I do the sanctuary calm
Of our dread goddess, with such shudd'ring awe
As when for the first time I stepped therein,
And to this place my spirit grows not used.
For an Almighty Will to which I gave
My being in submission, keeps me here
Concealed through weary years, and I am still,

As at the first, a stranger.—Ah, from me
The wide sea separates the souls I love,
And sometimes stand I day-long on the shore,
My full heart yearning to the land of Greece :
But to my sighs the waves but answer back,
Moaning with hollow tones unto my grief.
Woe to that one who, far from ties of home,
Leadeth a lonely life, and from whose lips
Is dashed the sweetest bliss by sorrow's hand.
His thoughts rove ever to his father's halls,
Where first upon him shone the sun from heaven ;
Where, joined by bands of love, he sported free
With children of the same dear parents born.
The wisdom of the gods dispute I not,
Yet piteous methinks is woman's fate.
Man ruleth all, in battle or at home,
In a strange land to help himself is strong ;
Conquest rejoiceth, victory crowneth him,
And lastly waiteth him a glorious death.
What narrow bounds mark out the woman's lot !
She in obeying a stern husband's will
Must find her consolation, e'en her joy.
If in the distance adverse destiny
Loometh upon her,—ah ! what misery !
Thus Thoas keeps me here,—a noble man,
Who fetters me with stern and sacred bands.
O goddess ! with what shame I must confess

That with reluctance calm I serve thee here,—
Thee, my deliverer, to whose service free,
My life should be devoted. Steadfastly,
Diana, have I hoped in thee, and still do trust ;
For thou hast taken me, the cast-off child
Of a great king, within thy gentle arm.
O daughter of Almighty Zeus, if thou
Hast graciously received the beauteous gift
Of Agamemnon, whom thou did'st oppress
With anguish, asking for his daughter's life,
And he his dearest to thine altar brought,—
If thou hast led him from the levell'd walls
Of Troy, back to the land of all his race,
Unto his wife, his daughter, and his son—
Then to my own—ah ! give me back once more,
And save me, who from death thou saved'st once,
From life upon this coast, a second death.

SCENE II.

Iphigenia. Arkas.

ARKAS.

KING THOAS doth by me a greeting send
Unto the priestess of Diana's fane,
This day will Tauris give her goddess thanks
For new and glorious victories achieved.

The king draws near, the army follows him ;
I hasten hither to announce it thee.

IPHIGENIA.

We are in readiness to welcome them,
And on the sacrifice from Thoas' hand
Our goddess bends a favourable eye.

ARKAS.

O that I also found the priestess' face,
Thy face, oh, holy virgin, so beloved,
Brighter and happier,—gladdening us all.
Mysterious sorrow and reserve e'er shrouds
Thine inmost soul, and vainly through long years
Wait we a trusting word from out thy breast.
Ah, long it is that I have seen thee thus ;
Before thy glance, must ever awe inspire
My shuddering heart? And still thy spirit's grief
Rests ever in thy inmost bosom wrapp'd,
As iron bands were forged around thy soul.

IPHIGENIA.

Know'st thou what exile is to the bereaved ?

ARKAS.

Feel'st thou in this land exiled and alone ?

IPHIGENIA.

Can foreign soil be as our native land ?

ARKAS.

But strange is thine own land become to thee.

IPHIGENIA.

Because it is so, can my bleeding heart
Not heal. In early youth, when my heart's love
Was strengthening to my parents, brother, sister,
When the young shoots in union sweet and true
Strove heavenward from the foot of the old stems,
A hard fate seized me, and from those I loved
Tore me away, breaking the beauteous wreath
With hand relentless ; she who erst had lived
So happily in the best joys of youth,
Blessings of early years, was carried far
From them. And e'en when saved was left
But as the shadow of her former self ;
And life's joys ne'er again have bloom'd in me.

ARKAS.

Since thou wilt call thyself so desolate,
Ungrateful must I call thee.

IPHIGENIA.

Thanks be thine !

ARKAS.

But not the heartfelt thanks thou giv'st to him
Who shows thee kindness ; not the joyous mien
That speaketh to thy lord of days content

Iphigenia

And heart submissive. Many years ago,
When to the Temple dark enshrouding fate
Brought thee mysteriously, then Thoas came
To meet thee, as a god's gift sent to him,
With reverence and devotion, and this coast
Was kind and friendly unto thee, although
Ever before, to strangers, full of dread.
Before thee, no one to our kingdom came
But by our ancient custom bleeding fell
A sacrifice on Dian's sacred steps.

IPHIGENIA.

The breath of freedom only makes not life :
What life is this, which in this holy place
I pass away in mourning, like a shade
Around its tomb? How can I call this life
Joyous, self-chosen, whereas each new day,
With pain and grief dream'd through, but leads me
still

On to another, which prepares me for
The days of Lethe's half-unconscious shore,
Where aimless wander ever the sad shades?
A useless life is as an early death,
And this, the woman's lot, is ever mine.

ARKAS.

Thy noble pride, which will not let thee rest,

Let me assure thee, whom I honour so,
Steals from thee all the sweetness of thy life.
Hast thou done nothing since thy coming here?
Who then has cheer'd the king's disordered mind?
Who with her gentle pleading has put off
From year to year the ancient custom cruel
That every stranger's life must forfeit be,
His life-blood from Diana's altar flow?
Who has so often sent the prisoners home
To their own country from a certain death?
Has not the goddess, 'stead of showing wrath
In that she miss'd her ancient sacrifice,
Received in gracious wise thy gentle prayers?
Hovers not Victory with joyous wing
Around the army? Is it not so e'en now?
And has not every man an easier lot,
Since that our king, who for so long a time
Has been our leader, wise and valorous,
Now, by the influence of thy presence sweet,
Rejoiceth us with mildness, lightening thus
The duty of unquestioning obedience?
Call'st thou it nothing that thy gentle power
Pours balm into so many thousand souls?
That, 'mid the folk where Heaven plac'd thee,
Thou art a spring unfailing of new joy,
And canst ensure on this unkindly coast
Peace unto strangers, and return to Greece?

Iphigenia

IPHIGENIA.

The little done seems nothing to the eye
Which looking onward, sees how much remains.

ARKAS.

Giv'st thou him praise who treasures not his works ?

IPHIGENIA.

All men blame him who values his own deeds.

ARKAS.

Him equally, whose pride counts good deeds
naught,
Or values overmuch his worthless works.
Believe me, maiden, listen to the words
Of him who serveth thee devotedly :—
If the king speaketh with thee, hearken him,
Help him to say that which is in his heart.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou saddenest me with every kindly word,
How oft I hear his offer wearily !

ARKAS.

Think what thou dost, and what thou shouldest do.
Now that the king has lost his only son
He trusts but few among his nearest kin,
And e'en those few not unreservedly.
On each young warrior he looks askance,

Fearing his aspiration to the throne.
He dreads an old age, helpless, solitary,
Or bold revolt, or maybe early death.
The Scythians place no value on fair words,
The king less than they all,—he who is used
Only to action, and to stern command,
Knows not the art of making lengthy speech
For furthering of his wishes. By reserve
And purposed misconstruing, make not harder
The words he finds so hard, but cheerfully
Prepare thy soul to meet his on the way.

IPHIGENIA.

Why should I hasten that which threatens me?

ARKAS.

Why wilt thou call his wooing thee a threat?

IPHIGENIA.

To me it is a threat most terrible.

ARKAS.

Give him but confidence for all his love.

IPHIGENIA.

If he from fear of marriage set me free.

ARKAS.

Why dost thou hide from him thine ancestry?

IPHIGENIA.

Unto a Priestess secrecy belongs.

ARKAS.

But from the king should be no secret kept,
And though he asks not confidence, he grieves;
And feels most deeply in his noble soul
That with such care thou hid'st thy heart from him.

IPHIGENIA.

Feeleth he 'gainst me anger and ill will?

ARKAS.

Thus it appears, although he speaks not of thee,
Yet have words dropp'd unwitting, show'd to me
That in his heart, the wish to call thee his,
Hath taken strong possession. Leave, oh, leave
Him not alone, lest that his wrath should burn
And compass thy destruction, who too late
Will think on my true counsel with repentance.

IPHIGENIA.

What? purposes the king that which no noble man
Who honours his good name, and tames his lusts
In reverence to the gods, should think upon.
Is it in truth his will, to take me from
The altar forcibly to be his wife?
Then upon all the holy gods I call,
And first upon Diana, resolute one,

Who will beneath her ægis shelter me.
A maiden gladly hears a maiden's prayer.

ARKAS.

Be calm ; fierce youthful blood moves not the king,
Such wanton follies are for ever past.
From his deep thought I fear a stern decree
Of other sort, which he will rigorously
Fulfil. His soul is silent, closely kept :
Therefore, if nothing more thou canst vouchsafe, .
I pray thee trust him, show him gratitude.

IPHIGENIA.

O tell me what is farther known to thee !

ARKAS.

I must away, afar I see the king.
Thou honourest him, let thy heart warm to him ;
Go trustingly and kindly forth to meet him.
By woman's gentleness a noble man
Will let himself be guided as a child. [*He goes out.*

IPHIGENIA (*alone*).

And yet, in truth, I see not how I may
Follow the counsel of that faithful man.
Willingly to the king I'll render thanks
And courteous words for all his benefits.
O may the words with truth united be
Wherewith I speak to please this mighty man.

SCENE III.

Iphigenia. Thoas.

IPHIGENIA.

WITH kingly gifts still may the goddess bless thee,
Vouchsafing to thee victory and fame,
Wellbeing of thy land, and riches great ;
Fulfilling every pious wish of thine,
That as o'er many wisely thou dost rule,
Thou too, may'st have rejoicing in their praise.

THOAS.

My people's praise alone would cause me joy ;
My conquests pleasèd others more than me.
He has the happiest lot, let him be king
Or be his station humbler, who at home
Finds the sweet ties man ever longeth for.
Thou gav'st me sympathy in my deep woe,
When from my side the foeman's long-sword cleft
My last, my best, my well-beloved son.
But while my every thought was for revenge,
I noticed not my dwelling's emptiness :
But since their kingdom is o'erthrown, and I,
Having avenged my son, return in peace,
Nothing remains at home which pleaseth me.
Joyous obedience, which in other days

Beamed forth from every eye, is quenchèd now
By fear and discontent. Each followeth
The childless king only perforce, and thinks
Upon the future gloomily. To-day
I come unto this sanctuary, where oft
For victory I have pray'd and given thanks,
Bearing an old desire in my heart.
It is not new to thee, this hope of mine,
To lead thee to my palace as my bride,
My blessing ever and my people's joy.

IPHIGENIA.

Of the unknown one askest thou too much ;
The fugitive, who nothing begg'd of thee
But peace and shelter, which thou gavest her,
Before thee stands ashamed, O my king.

THOAS.

That thou should'st ever veil in mystery
Thy race from me, as from my humblest subject,
Among no nation would be right and meet.
All strangers flee with terror from this coast,
Our safety and the law so order it ;
But from thee, maiden, who enjoyest here
Each pious right, I hoped for confidence.
Amongst us hast thou been a welcome guest,
Spending thy life according to thy will,

I hoped for trust, which e'er the host expects,
The sole requital of his kindly deeds.

IPHIGENIA.

'Twas diffidence, and not mistrust, O king,
Which bade me hide from thee my parents' names
And my descent. For ah, perchance, if thou
Did'st know who standeth here, what cursèd head
Thou fosterest and shelt'rest, thou would'st feel
A horror and great shuddering seize upon
Thy noble heart ; thou would'st quickly drive
Me from thy kingdom, 'stead of setting me
Beside thee as the sharer of thy throne.
Perhaps thou wouldest, to the misery
Which those await who are in banishment,
Thrust me with cold unsympathetic hands
Before it is ordained my wandering steps
Should once again to my own land return.

THOAS.

Whate'er the holy gods may will with thee—
Whate'er they have for thee and thine ordained—
Yet since the time thou dwellest in our land,
And here art treated as a sacred guest,
Blessings are pour'd upon me from above.
Hard will it be indeed to make me think
That I, in thine, shelter a guilty head.

IPHIGENIA.

The good deed brings thee blessing, not the guest.

THOAS.

Deeds done to the accursèd are not bless'd ;
End then thy silence, and refuse no more.
No unjust man requireth this of thee :
Into my hands the goddess trusted thee ;
And as to her thou sacred wert, so too
I honour thee as sacred. Then to me
In future let her sign be as a law.
If thou hast any hope of safe return
Unto thy home, then from all other claims
At once I set thee free without restraint.
But is thy homeward path for ever closed,
And should thy kinfolk in sad exile be,
Or by some great calamity extinct,
Then art thou mine for ever by all rights ;
Speak openly, thou know'st I keep my word !

IPHIGENIA.

From old restraint, unwillingly my tongue
Loosens itself, to tell a secret long
Kept hidden. For a secret once disclosed
Finds no returning to its dwelling-place.
As the gods will—it works—for good or ill.
Learn then !—Of Tantalus' race I come.

THOAS.

Thou tellest me a great thing tranquilly !
Is he thine ancestor whom once the world
Knew as one highly favour'd of the gods ?
That Tantalus, whom Jupiter himself
Led with him to the council and the feast ?
Whose ancient wisdom and discourses deep,
With much delight entwined, rejoiced the gods,
Who hearken'd as to words oracular ?

IPHIGENIA.

It is he,—but Immortals should not hold
Communion with mere men as with themselves.
The mortal race is far too poor and weak
Not to turn giddy in unused heights.
Neither of trait'rous mind nor base was he,
But for a slave too great, and being man,
Not strong enough the Thunderer's friend to be :
And so he fell, e'en as a man must fall.
Stern was his punishment, and poets sing,
That for presumption and unfaithfulness
Jove hurled him from his table in disgrace
To ancient Tartarus. And all his race
Have suffer'd since the hatred of the gods.

THOAS.

Bore they the guilt of Tantalus or their own ?

IPHIGENIA.

In truth his powerful nature, wondrous will,
Were the inheritance of all his sons ;
For round their foreheads forged the gods a band
Of brass, which from their gloomy sight conceal'd
Prudence, Restraint, Wisdom, and Patience meek.
To raging passion grew their least desire,
Which knew no bounds. First Tantalus' son,
Pelops, the strong-will'd, gain'd by treachery
And murder, Hippodamia, the fair
Daughter of CEnomaus. And by her
Begot two sons, Atreus and Thyestes.
Envious they watch their father's growing love
Unto his first-born by another wife ;
Hate bindeth them, and secretly the twain
Murder their brother, first-fruit of their crimes.
Pelops suspecteth Hippodamia,
And wrathfully demands of her his son,
Wherefore she kills herself.

THOAS.

Art silent ? speak,
Rue not thy confidence, but tell me more.

IPHIGENIA.

Happy is he who of his ancestors
Ever with joy keepeth the memory fresh ;
Who gladly speaketh of their noble acts

To those who love to listen. And he joys,
Feeling that he, closes this glorious line
Of ancestry. For a house brings not forth
Either a monster or a demigod
In the beginning. By succession slow
Of good and evil, groweth finally
A man to be the terror of the world,
Or else its pride and joy. After the death
Of Pelops, Atreus and Thyestes reigned
Together in the city ; but in peace
Could not long live. Thyestes first
Dishonoured his brother, who, in revenge,
Drove him from out the land. In after years,
Thyestes having stolen Atreus' son,
Brought him up secretly, as if his own.
His breast he fill'd with fury and revenge,
And sent him to the king's abode, that so
He, in his uncle, might his father kill.
But now the purpose of the youth is seen,
And cruelly is he punish'd by the king,
Imagining he slays his brother's son.
Too late he learns who writhes in torture there,
Dying in his frenzied sight. To satisfy
The passion of revenge within his breast,
He meditates on deeds most terrible,
Outwardly seeming peaceable and calm.
His brother with his sons he lureth back,

The boys are seized and slain ; at the first meal
The nauseous food, and horrible, is set
Before their father, who in eating feels
A melancholy creeping o'er his mind.
He asks to see his children, then expects
To hear their steps, their voices at the door ;
But Atreus, grinning, throws at him the heads
And feet of those his little ones. . . .
Shuddering thou turn'st away thy face, O king,
E'en so the sun-god turned his face away,
His wain diverting from the eternal track.
These of thy priestess are the ancestors.
Yet much of the unblestèd course of men,
Many a deed of shame and lawless will,
The night o'ershroudeth with her heavy wing,
Letting us but the dim dread twilight see.

THOAS.

Do thou conceal them too,—it is enough.
But tell me now, by what great miracle
Thou from this race of horror camest forth.

IPHIGENIA.

Atreus' eldest son was Agamemnon.
He is my father, and since childhood's years
Has been my pattern of a perfect man.
By Clytemnestra was I born to him
His first, his well-belovèd, then Electra.

Peacefully ruled the king, and long-sought rest
Unto the house of Tantalus was given.
But yet a son was wanting to complete
The happiness of both the king and queen ;
And hardly was Orestes given them
In answer to their wish, and 'gan to grow
By his two sisters—darling of the house—
Than for the peaceful home the gods prepared
New miseries. To thee the rumour reach'd
Of the great war, that 'fore the walls of Troy
Encamp'd all the princely powers of Greece,
The rape of beauteous Helen to avenge.
Whether they took the city and attain'd
The vengeance they desired, I have ne'er heard.
My father was the leader of the host,
And long at Aulis waited they in vain
A favourable wind to bear them thence.
Diana, 'gainst their noble lord incensed,
Held back th' impatient heroes, and required
Through her priest Calchas, ere the wind should blow,
The sacrifice of the king's eldest child.
Into the camp by promises they drew
Me and my mother. To the altar steps
Led me, and consecrated to Diana's will
This head ;—and by this act she was appeased.
She did not wish my blood, so veiled me
Savingly, in a cloud, and bore me here :

Thus from the agony of death I waked
To a new life before her in this fane.
—Yes, it is Iphigenia herself, O king,
Grandchild of Atreus, Agamemnon's daughter,
Diana's loved one, who before thee speaks.

THOAS.

Unto the daughter of a king I give
No greater favour—no increased trust—
Than to the maid of origin unknown.
My first proposal I repeat to thee :
Come, follow me, and share all I possess.

IPHIGENIA.

How can I take upon me such a step ?
Who but the goddess who has savèd me
Has power o'er my consecrated life ?
Perhaps she sought out shelter for me here,
And yet will render me unto my father—
For now he seems sufficiently chastised—
To be the joy and stay of his old age.
Perchance a joyous home-returning nears,
And I, not waiting her accomplish'd plan,
Might fetter myself here against her will.
I asked a sign, if I should here remain.

THOAS.

The sign is that thou still abidest here ;
Do not seek anxiously to leave our land.

He who refuseth speaketh lengthily,
The one refused hears nothing but the "Nay."

IPHIGENIA.

I do not seek to blind thee by my words,
To thee my inmost soul is daylight now.
And can'st thou not imagine how my heart,
Father and mother to embrace, must yearn,
Brother and sister too, I long to see,
How in the ancient halls, where sorrow yet
Whispers my name sometimes in silence deep,
From column unto column joy would twine
The beauteous wreath, as for a new-born child !
O, would'st thou send me thither in a ship,
Thou should'st on me and all, shed life renew'd.

THOAS.

Go thither then, do even as thou wilt,
And be not guided by the voices true
Of reason and wise counsel. To thy sex
Be faithful, and thyself give wholly up
Unto the fierce desire which seizeth thee,
Bearing thee every way without restraint.
If in a woman's bosom passion burns,
No holy hand restrains her from the traitor,
Who drags her from the long-proved, loving arms
Of Father or of Husband. Quenched betimes,

The passion unawakened in her breast
Hears not, though urged by golden tongues.

IPHIGENIA.

Be mindful Thoas, of thy given word.
Is't thus thou dost my confidence requite?
Thou seem'd'st willing everything to hear.

THOAS.

For this resistance had I never look'd,
Though what indeed could I expect beside:
Might I not have known I had to cope
With that which ever changes—woman's whims?

IPHIGENIA.

O king, dispraise not our despisèd sex,
The power of woman is not great as thine,
Yet not ignoble. Hearken to my words—
In this I am superior to thee. . . .
I know the things belonging to thy peace
Far better than thou knowest them thyself.
Thou dost imagine, knowing not thy heart
Nor mine, that closer bands would bring us joy;
With kind intent, and noble loving heart,
Thou urgest me to join my life with thine,
And here I bless the Gods, who strengthen me
The union to refuse, unblest by them.

THOAS.

It is no God that speaketh, but thine heart.

IPHIGENIA.

By our own hearts alone they speak to us.

THOAS.

And have I not the right to hear them then ?

IPHIGENIA.

The storm of passion smothers their calm voice.

THOAS.

Hears them aright the priestess only then ?

IPHIGENIA.

The ruler before all should heed the gods.

THOAS.

Thy holy office and inheritance
Bring thee in closer commune with the gods
Than a rough, earth-born man.

IPHIGENIA.

And even so

I smart for this extorted confidence.

THOAS.

I am but human—better 'tis we close

Our conference ; and thus stands my decree :
Be priestess to Diana, as she hath
Thee chosen, but may she pardon me
That hitherto unjustly, and in truth
Reproaching myself inly, I have kept
From her the ancient, looked-for sacrifice.
No stranger peacefully may near our coast,
Of old he knows to look for certain death.
But, by thy friendliness, thou fettered'st me
As if with magic bands, so that sometimes
I deeply joy'd to see a daughter's love,
At others, loving silence of a bride.
Thou lull'dst my mind asleep so I heard not,
Or hearken'd not, my people's murmuring ;
With voices loud, they mind me of the guilt
Of my son's early death. No more will I
For thy sake hold in check the multitude,
Who clamour for the sacrifice.

IPHIGENIA.

For me,—this sacrifice I ne'er desired ;
He misconstrues the Immortals who believes
That they are bloodthirsty. He clotheth them
By his imagination in his own
Cruel passions. Did not the goddess take
Me from the priests herself?—because to her
My service was more welcome than my death ?

THOAS.

It is not our part to explain away,
Or with light careless reasoning to dispose,
After our pleasure, of a sacred law.
Fulfil thy duty, I will do the same.
Two strangers whom we found, hid in a cave
Here on the coast, who bring into my land
No blessing—now are guarded in my power.
With these unto thy goddess shalt thou bring
Her long withheld and rightful sacrifice !
I send them hither, and thou know'st thy part.

SCENE IV.

IPHIGENIA (*alone*).

GRACIOUS protectress, Thou hast clouds
In which to enwrap Thy followers pure,
And out of Misfortune's merciless arms
To bear them on winds over the sea
Wheresoever it seemeth good to Thee.
Wise art Thou and knowest the future,
The past is as present to Thee,
And resteth Thine eye on Thy chosen
As Thy glory, the life of the night,
Ruleth and resteth over the earth.
O restrain Thou from blood these hands.

Ne'er bringeth it blessing and peace
And the shade of the haplessly slain
Will for dread hours lower and shriek,
Over the slayer, sad and unwilling.
For the Immortals love men
Of far-spread and noble descent,
And they lengthen the swift-passing life
Of the mortal gladly, bidding him
For a while in their own eternal heaven
Rejoice with them in the vision of glory.

A C T I I.

SCENE I.

Orestes. Pylades.

ORESTES.

IT is the path of death that now we tread ;
With every step my soul becomes more calm.
When I Apollo prayed to take away
The Furies' dreadful presence from my side,
He seem'd to promise me deliverance
With god-like words, certain and full of hope,
And spake of succour too within the fane
Of his loved sister, who o'er Tauris rules.
And thus it comes to pass that all my grief
Shall shortly end for ever with my life.
To me, whose heart is crush'd, whose joy is hid
By a god's hand, how easy it will be
To leave resignedly the sunlight fair.
And if the sons of Atreus may not win
A death of glory, crown'd by victory,

If, like my ancestors, and like my father,
A victim I must bleed in agony
Of death—so let it be. And better here
Before the altar, than in solitude,
Where the assassin, link'd by sacred ties,
Spreadeth the secret snare before my feet.
Till then, infernal maidens, let me rest ;
Ye, who like loose-let dogs, surround my path,
Scenting the trickling blood which flows from me ;
Leave me—soon I descend to your abode.
The daylight pure should see nor you nor me.
The earth's bright verdant carpet should not serve
As scenes of strife for spirits, but below
I'll seek for you again, there the same fate
Binds all in dim night through Eternity.
But thou, Pylades, thou the guiltless mate
Both of my sin and curse, I take thee, too,
Ah, how unwillingly ! below with me,
In little time unto that land of woe.
The thought that thou mayest live or mayest die
Fills me alternately with hope or fear.

PYLADES.

I am not yet, my friend, prepared like thee
Into this shadow kingdom to descend
By the entangled paths which seem to lead
Ever towards black darkness, yet I think

To wind' our way up to the path of life.
I think not upon death ; I muse, and look around
To see whether in counsel of the gods
A joyous flight is not prepared for us.
Resistless cometh death, fear'd or unfear'd.
E'en when the priestess consecrating us,
Raiseth her hand to shear our clust'ring locks,
Still our escape shall be my only thought.
Uprouse thy soul from this despondency.
Surely thou mak'st the danger show more great :
Apollo's word was true, that in the fane
Of his great sister thou should'st surely find
Sweet consolation, safety, and return.
The holy gods speak not with meanings dark,
As in despair th' afflicted one believes.

ORESTES.

My mother cast around my tender head
In heavy folds the gloomy veil of life ;
And thus in me my father's image grew,
And my mute look was ever a reproof
To Clytemnestra and her paramour.
How often when the calm Electra sat
Weeping so bitterly beside the fire
In a great room given to our women's use,
Close to her bosom I have press'd myself
And look'd up at her with my wondering eyes.

Then of our noble father oft she spake.
O how I long'd to see him, to be with him,
Now wish'd myself at Troy, now him at home.
But the day came.

PYLADES.

. . . . Of that hour's deed
Let shades of hell their nightly converse hold;
Let the remembrance of a happier time
For a fresh hero-life renew our strength.
Th' immortals need full many a noble man
To do their service here in this wide earth,
Upon thee have they counted. See, they gave
Thee not unto thy father's company,
When he unwilling sank to Orkus down.

ORESTES.

O, that his raiment seizing, I had followed!

PYLADES.

E'en so have those who then preservèd thee
Cared well for me. O what had been my fate
If thou had'st never lived, I cannot tell,
Since I for thee and for thy sake alone
Have lived from childhood up, and yet do live.

ORESTES.

Bring not to my remembrance those fair days

When refuge in thy house was given me ;
Thy noble father, wise and full of love,
The young, half-blighted blossom rear'd with care ;
And thou, an ever-cheerful playfellow,
Hover'd around me with new life each day,
Like a bright butterfly round a sombre flower,
Breathing unceasing joy unto my soul,
So that, forgetting all my heavy grief,
With thee I sported in the careless joy
And freshness of our youth.

PYLADES.

My life began when I had thee to love.

ORESTES.

Say thou, " My grief began," and true thou spak'st !
It is the greatest anguish of my fate
That I like an accursèd exile bear
Secretly in my bosom pain and death ;
So where I tread, e'en in the healthiest spot,
The beauteous faces round me soon give sign
Of the sad progress of a lingering death.

PYLADES.

I should have been the first this death to die
If thy breath, my Orestes, ever poison'd.
Am I not always still o'erfill'd with joy

And courage? Are not joy and love the wings
To hero deeds?

ORESTES.

To great deeds? Truly so!

Well I remember when we forward look'd
And saw them in our future, when we twain
O'er mountain and through valley chased the stag,
And hoped in time to come thus to pursue
The track of robber and of monster wild
With sword and club, like our great ancestors
Unconquered still in courage and in strength.
Then in the evening sat we peacefully,
Beside the broad sea, in each other's arms;
The waves play'd nearly up to touch our feet,
The world before us lay so wide and clear,
And often one of us would seize his sword,
And thoughts of future deeds encircled us
Unnumbered as the stars from out the night.

PYLADES.

Unending is the labour which the soul
Longs to fulfil, for we would have each deed
At once as great as when in other climes,
'Mid other races in the years to come,
'Tis grown and spread, for that the poet's mouth
Hath sent it down to long posterity.
Th' achievements of our fathers sound so grand,

When resting in the shade of eventide
The young folk drink them in accompanied
By the sweet harpstrings ; what great acts we do,
Unto their deeds are but as vain patchwork,
And labour thrown away.
So run we after that which flies from us,
And look not to the path in which we tread,
Scarce seeing at our side our fathers' steps,
And the sure footprints of their earthly life.
After their phantoms, ceaselessly we run,
Which, godlike, are as far removed from us
As are the mountains crown'd with golden clouds.
Nought I esteem the man who only thinks
Of self, and how the world shall give him praise,
But thou, Orestes, thank the holy gods,
Who e'en so early, much by thee have wrought.

ORESTES.

When they grant glorious works unto a man,
So that from those he loves he wardeth ill,
His land enlargeth, and its bounds secures,
And causeth ancient foes to flee or fall,
Then let him offer praise ; for unto him,
A god has not begrudged life's greatest bliss.
Me, they chose out to be a murderer,
To slay my mother,—yet I honour'd her ;
And now into the dust they cast me down,

Repenting this dark deed in woe and shame.
Believe me, they have doom'd to ruin sure
The house of Tantalus, and I the last
May not go glorious and guiltless hence.

PYLADES.

The gods do not revenge upon the sons
The misdeeds of their ancestors, but each
According to his work earns his reward ;
A parent's blessing is inherited,
But not his curse.

ORESTES.

Methinks 'tis not his blessing leads us here.

PYLADES.

In any case, the high gods will it thus.

ORESTES.

Then their will is it which destroyeth us !

PYLADES.

Do as they have commanded thee and wait.
If thou unto Apollo bring'st the sister,
And both united dwell in Delphi's fane,
Both worshipp'd by a noble race of men,
Then for this deed will th' immortal pair
Be gracious unto thee, will save thee from

Those maidens dark who dwell beneath the earth :
E'en now not one of the unholy three
Dares in this sanctuary to set her foot.

ORESTES.

Then shall I have at least a peaceful death.

PYLADES.

We shall not die, methinks, and not unskill'd
Have I the Future by the Past compared,
Interpreting their meaning silently.
Perhaps this plan has long been ripening
In knowledge of the gods.—Diana yearns
To leave this country of barbarians,
And all their bloody human offerings.
We were appointed to the glorious act
By her laid on us, and by leading strange
Already wait we at the temple gate.

ORESTES.

Thou bind'st with a rare tact thine own wise thought
In unison with the immortals' will.

PYLADES.

To what end tendeth human wisdom, then,
If to that highest will we listen not?
When a god calleth out a noble man,
Who hath great crimes committed, to a task

Of difficulty, laying upon him
A work it seems impossible to end,
The hero-spirit triumphs over all ;
And in repentance serveth he the gods
And men who honour him.

ORESTES.

If I am still ordained to live and work,
Ah ! may a god remove from my stunn'd brow
The giddiness which, down the slippery path
Wet with my mother's blood, drags me to death.
May he in mercy staunch th' eternal spring
Which, oozing from my mother's wounds, defileth me.

PYLADES.

Wait patiently, thou dost increase the ill,
Taking the Furies' work upon thyself.
Give me but time to think, remain thou still.
When at the last united strength we need
To do the action, I will call on thee,
And then to its achievement we will pass
With mutual dauntlessness.

ORESTES.

I hear Ulysses speak !

PYLADES.

Spare mocking words !
His hero must each man select himself,

And after him toil up the rugged road
Which leadeth to Olympus ; I confess,
Prudence and stratagem it seemeth me
Dishonour not a man who consecrates
His life to hardy deeds.

ORESTES.

I honour him who brave and upright is.

PYLADES.

And therefore do I ask from thee no help.
Already is one step accomplished.
I from our keepers many things have drawn :
A strange-born godlike maid, held in restraint,
Keeps back this bloody law, bringing instead
A pure heart, prayer, and incense to the gods.
Highly her gentleness is here esteemed,
They think she cometh of the Amazons,
And has escaped from great calamity.

ORESTES.

It seemeth her bright sway hath lost its power
Through the approach of him whom the dread curse
Like an expansive night, follows and shrouds.
The pious thirst for blood once more unchains
The ancient custom which shall us destroy.
It is the king's wild passion killing us,
A *woman* cannot save us from his rage.

PYLADES.

Our greatest safeguard lieth in her sex,
For e'en the best of men accustometh
His mind to cruelty, and at last creates
A law from that he most abhors, which grows
Unrecognisable from constant use.
But woman of one mind remaineth still
In steadfastness of purpose. And in her
More safely may one trust for deeds of good
As well as deeds of evil. Hush ! she comes ;
Leave us alone ! I must not tell our names,
Our fate, nor trust her utterly. Go thou :
I will rejoin thee ere she speaks with thee.

SCENE II.

Iphigenia. Pylades.

IPHIGENIA.

TELL me, O stranger, who and what thou art ?
A Greek thou rather seemest than a Scythian.

[She takes off his chains.]

The liberty I give is danger's sign,
O may the gods avert thy threaten'd fate.

PYLADES.

O sweet voice, welcome is the mother-tongue



When in a strange land spoken ; though but now
Made prisoner, I again with joy behold
The mountains blue around my native haven.
Let this my joy give thee assurance full
That I too, am a Greek. The vision bright
Had chain'd my spirit, so I had forgot
What need I have of thee. O tell thou me,
If no decree of fate closeth thy lips,
From which of our illustrious stems dost thou
Trace back afar thy god-like ancestry?

IPHIGENIA.

The priestess whom the goddess chose herself
Now speaks with thee : that surely is enough.
Say, who art thou, and what sad fate hath brought
Thee with thy friend to this strange far-off land?

PYLADES.

In few words can I tell thee what a fate
With company oppressive follows us.
O that thou, heavenly one, as easily
Could'st show to us the joyful glance of hope !
From Crete are we, sons of Adrastus' house,
I am the younger, callèd Cephalus,
And he Laodamus, the eldest son.
Between us was another, rough and wild,
Who often, when we sported, did disturb

The peace and happiness of my brother.
Whilst with our mother we were left alone
We render'd her obedience, when as yet
Our father's hosts lay before Ilion's walls;
But when with booty laden he return'd,
And shortly after died, the strife rose high
Concerning the inheritance and crown,
Between the brothers. With the eldest-born
I sided, and by him was slain the second.
Now round the guilty one unceasing press
The Furies fierce. And therefore to this coast
Delphian Apollo sendeth us in hope,
Saying that in his sister's sanctuary
Help waiteth us, her hand with blessings charged.
Here are we brought as prisoners, and placed
As victims in thy charge : now know'st thou all.

IPHIGENIA.

Fell Troy? O thou dear man! Art sure of this?

PYLADES.

It lies in ruins. Give us safety then!
Hasten the help a god hath promised us!
Comfort my brother in his sorrow deep!
Say thou to him a kindly, helpful word!
Spare his sad spirit when thou speakest him
I do beseech thee; for his inmost soul

Iphigenia

Through joy, through sorrow, and through memory
Is easily affected and destroyed.

Upon him then a feverish madness falls,
And his pure, beauteous soul becomes a prey
To the relentless furies.

IPHIGENIA.

Great though thy sorrow be, I conjure thee
Forget it while thou tell'st me all thou canst.

PYLADES.

The wondrous town, which for ten weary years
Withstood the whole great army of the Greeks,
Now lies in ruins, ne'er again to rise.
And many graves of our brave men recall
Our thoughts to the barbarian coast afar.
Achilles lies there with his dearest friend.

IPHIGENIA.

Then are the men, made by the holy gods
Most like unto themselves, turn'd into dust.

PYLADES.

Also Palamedes, Ajax, son of Telamon,
No more in their own land they saw the sun.

IPHIGENIA.

He speaks not of my father, names him not

Among the slain. Yes, he still lives for me,
And I shall see him. Oh, hope on my heart !

PYLADES.

O, blessèd are the thousands, they who died
The bitter, yet sweet, death by foeman's hand.
For one, a hostile, irritated god,
Prepares on his return but shrieks confused,
And 'stead of triumph death of saddest kind.
Bring not men's voices the sad tale to you ?
Where'er they go they spread the news around
Of deeds most awful which have taken place.
Is, then, to thee the grief which ever fills
Mycenæ's halls with oft-repeated sighs.
A secret ? Know, then, Clytemnestra has
Ensnared her husband ; Ægisthus helped her
The day of his return to murder him.
Ah ! then thou honoured'st this kingly house.
I see thy breast strives vainly to control
Th' effect of words, to thee so terrible,
So unexpected ! Art thou, then, perhaps
The daughter of a friend ? Wert born maybe
Near to the palace in the very town ?
Conceal it not, bear no ill will to me
That I these horrors first to thee revealed !

IPHIGENIA.

Say on ; how was the sad deed brought about ?

PYLADES.

The day of his return, when that the king
Stepp'd out refresh'd and peaceful from his bath,
Asking his kingly robe from his wife's hand,
She on destruction bent, threw over him—
Upon his shoulders, round his noble head,
A web-like robe, with self-entangling folds.
And while, as from a net, he vainly strove
To extricate himself, Ægisthus,
The traitor, slew him, and this great prince, veil'd,
Went to the banks of Lethe.

IPHIGENIA.

And the assassin? what reward had he?

PYLADES.

A kingdom and a wife, which he possess'd before.

IPHIGENIA.

A sinful passion led, then, to this deed?

PYLADES.

And deep remembrance of an ancient grudge.

IPHIGENIA.

Then in what way had the king injured her?

PYLADES.

By a stern act, which gave her good excuse,

If an excuse for murder there can be.
When a divinity with adverse winds
Withstood the voyage of the Greeks to Troy,
Her father Agamemnon lured his child '
Iphigenia, his eldest, unto Aulis.
Before Diana's altar fell she slain,
A bloody sacrifice to help the Greeks.
The mother's heart thereon with bitterness
So ponder'd, that herself she yielded
To Ægisthus' suit, destruction bringing
Upon her husband, with her net wrapp'd round.

IPHIGENIA (*veiling herself*).

It is enough ! Anon I'll be with thee.

PYLADES (*alone*).

She seems much moved by th' untimely fate
Of this great king. Whoever she may be
Most certainly she has well known the king,
And is (oh, happiness for us) sent here
From a most noble house ; calm thyself, heart,
And let the star of hope which o'er us shines,
With joyous courage lead us bravely on.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

Iphigenia. Orestes.

IPHIGENIA.

UNHAPPY one, I come to loose thy chains,
Though but a sign it is of nearing death.
The freedom given thee in this sacred place
Cometh but as the last bright flash of life
Unto the sick man, messenger of death.
Now must I tell thee—but, I dare not say
That ye are lost. Oh, how shall I devote
Your heads to death, with murderess' hand.
No one dare do ye harm, whoe'er he be,
While I am priestess in Diana's fane.
But if one duty I should leave undone,
Which, in his anger, the king bids me to,
One of my virgins will he then elect
To take my place, and then, what can I do
But stand beside ye, full of burning thoughts?

O well-belovèd Greeks, the meanest slave
Who by our hearth has touch'd the household gods,
Is very dear to us in a strange land.
How shall I give ye welcome, with such joy
And blessing as befits ye, who to me
The images of heroes, whom I learnt
To honour from my parents, now bring back,
And flatteringly, with new and wondrous hope,
Refresh most graciously my inmost soul.

ORESTES.

And wilt thou hide thy name and thy descent
With prudent thought? Or wilt thou let me know
Who, like to an immortal, visitest me?

IPHIGENIA.

Thou too shalt know me. Tell to me again,
What I but partly from thy brother heard;
The fate of him, who coming back from Troy,
Met in his dwelling but the mute cold waves
Of violent death, most bitter and unsought.
True I was very young when hither borne,
Yet well remember I, the tim'rous looks
Which I with wonder and with fearfulness
Threw on the heroes. For it seem'd me as
Olympus had disclosed the forms to view

Of th' illustrious ones of former times, -
Great Ilion to affright,
And glorious Agamemnon shone o'er all.
Oh ! tell me did he fall on his return
Through malice of his wife and her Ægisthus ?

ORESTES.

Thou sayest it.

IPHIGENIA.

Woe to thee, curst Mycenæ,
Which Tantalus' children have o'erfill'd
With curse on curse from out their wild fierce hands,
And like a weed shaking its lonely head,
And strewing round it thousand living seeds,
Beget they children, born of murderers,
To everlasting, ever-changing grief.
Unveil thou, of thy brother's tale to me,
What in the dimness and the shrieks I lost :
How has the last son of this noble stem,
Orestes, well-loved child, ordain'd one day
His father to avenge, escaped his death ?
Did fate entrap him in Avernus' net ?
Is he yet safe ? and does Electra live ?

ORESTES.

They live.

IPHIGENIA.

O golden sun, lend thou to me
Thy fairest rays, that I may offer them
Before Jove's throne ! For I am poor and mute.

ORESTES.

Art thou a friend, then, of this kingly house,
Art thou *to him* united by near ties,
E'en as thy beauteous joy betrays to me !
Rein in thy feelings, and control thy heart !
To joyous hearts how must a sudden change
From joy to grief be nigh unbearable.
I see he has but told thee of the death
Of Agamemnon.

IPHIGENIA.

And of such tidings, have I not enough ?

ORESTES.

Of all these horrors hast thou heard but half.

IPHIGENIA.

Orestes and Electra *live*, what must I fear ?

ORESTES.

And Clytemnestra, fear'st thou not for her ?

IPHIGENIA.

She's doomed, nor hope nor fear can rescue her.

ORESTES.

Out of the land of hope she too is gone.

IPHIGENIA.

Shed she her own blood, frantic with remorse?

ORESTES.

Nay, but her own blood slew her suddenly.

IPHIGENIA.

Speak plainly then, that I no longer doubt.
Uncertainty's dark wing that flaps around
My timid head kills me a thousand times.

ORESTES.

Have then the mighty gods made choice of me
As messenger, to tell thee of a deed
Which I most willingly would hide away
In the dark soundless kingdom of the night?
Against my will constrains me thy sweet mouth,
But as it asks this dreadful thing to know
So must thou be content to hearken it.
The day her father fell by treachery
Electra hid her brother savingly :
Strophius, the mother's father, took the boy

And brought him up along with his own son
Pylades,—who around the stranger boy
Wound beauteous bands of friendship by his love,
And as they grew, a burning eagerness
The king's death to avenge, increased in them.
... Unrecognized and strangely clad they reached
Mycenæ, where they spread the troublous news
Of the heir's death—Orestes' ashes show'd.
The queen received them well, so that they went
Into the house. Electra made her known
Unto Orestes, and revenge she stirr'd
Within him, which the mother's sacred form
Had lull'd to sleep within his youthful breast.
She led him to the place where fell their sire,
Where yet an old, faint stain of the brave blood
They honour'd so, colour'd the oft-wash'd floor,
Foreshadowing awful things with its pale streaks.
... Then with her tongue of fire, painted to him
Each circumstance of the atrocious deed,
Her slavish, miserable, wasted life,
The prosperous traitor's insolence to her,
And danger threatening e'en their relatives
From Clytemnestra, now grown hard and cruel.
Here, that old dagger she held out to him
Which in blind anger had been used before
In Tantalus' house
So Clytemnestra fell, by her son's hand.

IPHIGENIA.

Undying one, who through the clear, calm day,
For ever blessèd, retest on bright clouds,
Hast thou, then, sunder'd me so many years
From men, receivèd me so nigh thyself,
Upon me laid the child-like, sweet employ
To feed thy sacred flame, so that my soul
Lingers within thy dwelling, like the fire
In pure unceasing piety, that I
Should only feel the troubles of my line
Later, with deeper grief? O tell me all
Thou know'st of that unhappiest, dearest one,
Speak to me of my well-beloved Orestes.

ORESTES.

O would that I could tell thee of his death !
For ireful rises from the reeking blood
The mother's shade—
Calls to the ancient daughters of the night :
“ Have care my murderer escape ye not—
Follow the criminal, your rightful prey ! ”
They hearken, and their hollow eyes do search
Around them with an eagle's fierce desire ;
Anon they stir themselves in their black cave,
And from their corners their companions dread,
Doubt and Remorse, drag themselves softly out.
Before them rises steam from Acheron,—

Wreathing, and telling in its misty round,
Th' eternal repetition of those things,
Entangling ever round the guilty head ;
And for destruction authorized, they tread
The beauteous earth, belovèd of the gods,
From which a curse in time past exiled them.
That wretched one they follow with swift foot,
And give him rest, but to return again.

IPHIGENIA.

Unhappy youth, in a like case art thou,
And know'st what he, poor fugitive, must feel.

ORESTES.

What sayest thou? what know'st thou of my case?

IPHIGENIA.

Like him, a murdered brother troubleth thee,
Thy younger brother told it me in trust.

ORESTES.

Pure soul! I cannot suffer it that thou
By a false word should'st be deceived in this!
A web of lies, cunning and full of art,
Weave strangers for each other, as a trap
Before their feet,

But between us, let there be truth alone !
... I am Orestes ! and this guilty head
Sinks sadly to the earth, and seeks for death ;
In any form most welcome will it be.
Whoever thou may'st be, I trust that thou,
And he my dearest friend, may find escape.
Thou seem'st restrainèd here against thy will—
Find means of flight, and go, and leave me here.
My body shall be cast adown the rock ;
My blood shall trickle forth unto the sea,
Bringing a curse on the barbarian coast.
Go home unto the beauteous land of Greece,
To find a new life full of happiness.

[*He goes out.*

IPHIGENIA.

O fairest daughter of thy noble sire,
Fulfilment of our wishes nears at last.
How great thine image stands before me here,
Scarce do mine eyes reach up unto thy hands
Which, running o'er with fruit and crowns of joy,
The treasures of Olympus gather in.
For as abundant giving marks a king,
To whom that is but little, which to his
Subjects a great store of riches seems,
So, O ye gods, know we to recognize
Your hands by wise and long-preparèd gifts.
For ye alone know what is for our good,

Who see the future's vast and far-spread land,
Which every evening's stars and hills of cloud
Hide from our mortal sight.
Our supplication hear ye patiently,
Who unto ye like children pray for haste,
But your hands never bring unripe to us,
The golden fruits of heaven. Woe unto him
Who seizing them too soon tastes but his death.
O that this waiting, with its threefold pain,
May now be over, and that the great joy
Hardly yet tasted, turn not into shades
Of friends departed. Hasten it to me.

ORESTES (*coming again towards her*).

Cry to the gods for thee and for Pylades,
But for my name, mention it not with thine ;
Thou can'st not save the criminal, with whom
Mingling thy fate would gain thee curse and grief.

IPHIGENIA.

My fate with thine most closely is entwined.

ORESTES.

With none I'll mingle, let me go alone
And unaccompanied unto my death.
Even if with thy veil thou sheltered'st
My guilty head, thou could'st not save me from

Those ever-watchful eyes, O heavenly one.
Thy presence deadens but awhile their voice,
And scares them not away eternally.
They dare not with their bold and hateful feet
Invade the sacred grove, yet do I hear
Their ghastly laugh afar, now and again.
Thus doth the wolf howl furious round the tree,
Where clings the traveller to save himself.
They rest without, and when I leave this grove
Then will they rise, shaking their deathly heads,
And raising clouds of dust on every side,
Drive forth their prey before them.

IPHIGENIA.

Can'st thou, Orestes, listen to one word?

ORESTES.

Spare it for one beloved of the gods !

IPHIGENIA.

It is to give thee light of joyous hope.

ORESTES.

Through smoke and vapour see I the pale gleam
Of Lethe's waters lighting me to hell.

IPHIGENIA.

Hast thou no other sister save Electra ?

ORESTES.

Only Electra know I, for a fair fate
Which to us seemed hard, removed the elder
Early from out the misery of our house . . .
O leave thy questions ; be not thou in yoke
With the Eumenides. Maliciously
They blow from out my soul the ashes dead,
And will not suffer that the embers red
Of that dread fire once kindled in our house
May be extinguishèd. Must, then, the flame
Once kindled wilfully in times long past,
By hell fumes fed, burn torturing through my soul
Eternally?

IPHIGENIA.

I cast sweet frankincense into the flame ;
O let the pure breath of my love into
Thy bosom blow, gently to cool the blaze.
Orestes, dear one,—cans't thou not perceive ?
Or has the presence of th' infernal gods
Indeed dried up the blood within thy veins ?
Creeps through thy limbs a strong benumbing spell,
As from Medusa's loathsome, snaky head ?
If of a mother's blood th' avenging voice
Calleth thee down to hell with hollow tones—
From sister pure shall not the words of peace
Call from Olympus' height the gods of help ?

ORESTES.

They call, they call ! Wilt thou destroy me then ?
Hides there in thee a goddess of revēge ?
Who can'st thou be, whose voice so terrible,
Strikes of my inmost soul its deepest chords ?

IPHIGENIA.

I see,—thou feelest it within thy heart,
Orestes, I am she ! See, Iphigenia !
I live.

ORESTES.

Thou ! . . .

IPHIGENIA.

My brother !

ORESTES.

Leave me,—away.—

I counsel thee, touch not these locks accurst.
A fire untameable inflames my breast,
Most like to Creusa's fatal bridal robe.
Leave me like Hercules to die alone
The death of shame, shut up within myself.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou shalt not go to the infernal realm ;
O that from thee I might one calm word hear !
Ye gods, unloose my doubt, and let the joy

So long implored at last be given to me.
A wheel of mixèd joy and grief revolves
Within my soul ;—a shuddering keeps me back
From the strange man,—and yet my inmost heart
Recalls me powerfully to my brother.

ORESTES.

Is this the Temple of Lyæus then,
Doth a wild holy rage the priestess seize ?

IPHIGENIA.

O hear me ! look at me ! A long time since
How my heart opens to receive the thing
In life to me most blessèd and most dear—
With yearning arms to empty air outstretch'd,
To clasp thee, and to kiss thy brow beloved.
Ah ! let me, let me come, th' eternal spring
Splashing adown Parnassus not more purely falls
From rock to rock into the golden vale,
Than from my heart joy rises strong and free,
And like a peaceful lake encircles me,—
Orestes, my own brother !

ORESTES.

I trust thee not,
Nor e'en thy flatteries, O beauteous nymph.
Diana claimeth priestesses most pure,

And will avenge her temple desecrate.
Remove away thine arm from off my breast,
If 'tis thy will a noble youth to save,
To love, and offer to him happiness,
Bestow thy heart upon my friend, a worthier man ;
He wanders round amidst the rocky place,
Seek him, and show him how he may escape.

IPHIGENIA.

Brother, command thyself, and see the truth.
Do not mistake a sister's heaven-born joy
For inconsiderate and sinful lust
. . . . O, from his erring eyes remove the veil,
That now this moment of the highest joy,
Be not, instead, of threefold misery
Thy long-lost sister standeth by thee here ;
The goddess took me from before the altar
And brought me hither to her sanctuary.
Thou art a prisoner, unto sacrifice
Predestined, and the priestess is thy sister.

ORESTES.

O wretched man, must then the sun's sweet rays,
Behold the ending horrors of our race ?
Is not Electra here, that she with us
May to the land of darkness go, and not
Have respite of her life to sadder fate.

See, to the altar I will follow thee,
For fratricide, this is the ancient law
Of our old race, and you I thank, O gods,
That to destroy me ye have made decree
Ere children can my race perpetuate.
. . . . And thee I counsel, love thou not too
much
The light of the glorious sun, and the clear stars.
Into the kingdom of eternal night
Come, follow me. . . .
Where dragons, born of sulphurous billows, fight,
And swallowing up the hell-brood born of them,
Thus the ferocious race destroys itself.
Follow me there, oh childless, guiltless one,
Thou look'st at me with pity, do not so ;
With such mild looks did Clytemnestra seek
A way unto the softness of my heart.
Whirling my arm, I cleft into her breast,—
My mother fell. Appear, indignant Shade,
In the charm'd circle enter then, ye Furies,
And linger near the welcome spectacle,
The last, the ghastliest prepared for you.
Nor hate nor vengeance sharpen now the knife,
My loving sister to the deed is forced.
Weep not! Why shouldest thou? thou hast no
guilt,
Since early childhood have I nothing loved

As I could love thee, sister !
 Yes, raise on high thy knife unfaltering,
 And pierce my guilty breast, discov'ring thus
 A path for all the streams that seethe therein.
[He sinks swooning to the ground.]

IPHIGENIA (*alone*).
 To bear alone this joy and misery
 Is past my power ; where art thou, Pylades ?
 Where shall I find thy help, belovèd youth ?
[She goes out, seeking him.]

SCENE II.

ORESTES (*waking from his swoon and raising himself*).

YET one more, reach me from the banks of
 Lethe
 One last cool goblet, giving perfect rest.
 Soon is the life convulsion from the breast
 Rejected. And my soul lies very still,
 Calm'd in the deep source of forgetfulness,
 And meet to bear you company, ye shades,
 In dimness everlasting. Gladly rests
 In your great peace, the hard-press'd child of
 earth.
 What whisp'rings do I hear amidst the trees ?

What gentle sounds through the dim twilight rustle?—
They come already the new guest to greet !
Who are the multitude that look to me,
Like the assemblage of a princely line
Rejoicing now in glorious communion ?
Peacefully walk they there, the old, the young,
Women and men, godlike appear the forms
Wandering,—like unto my ancestors.
Yes ! and they *are* the great ones of my race.—
In friendly converse there with Atreus
Walketh Thyestes, round them sport the boys.
Is then no enmity between you here ?
Does vengeance leave you with the sun's fair light ?
Then am I also welcome, and I may
In your august procession take my place.

“ Fathers, all hail, Orestes greeteth you,
Of your great race the last descendant.
What ye did sow, that hath he reaped,
And laden with curses come down to this place.
For here is each burden more easily borne :
Take him, oh, take him into your circle !—
Atreus, I greet thee, thee also Thyestes,
Here are we all from enmity loosed.—
Show me, my father, whom I in life
Saw but once !—Art thou my father ?
And in confidence lives my mother with thee ?
If Clytemnestra dares clasp thy hand

Then may Orestes stand before her
 And trustfully say : ' Behold thy son !—
 Look on your son, oh, bid him welcome !
 In our house on earth remember ye,
 Greeting was the signal for murder,
 And the race of ancient Tantalus
 Finds joy on the other side of night.
 You welcome me, and take me to you,
 Lead me to our great ancient father.
 Where is our ancestor? Let me behold
 His most beloved and reverend head,
 Who sat with holy gods in counsel !
 You seem to hesitate—to turn from me.
 What is it? Suffers the godlike one?
 Ah, woe is me ! the all-powerful gods
 Have rivetted with heavy fetters
 Cruel tortures to the heroic breast."

SCENE III.

Orestes. Iphigenia. Pylades.

ORESTES.

ALREADY are you also hither come?
 Welcome, my sister ! Yet is one not here.
 Oh ! may a kind god send anon to us,
 By means of gentle arrows, our Electra.

Thou, my poor friend, in troth, I pity thee ;
Come with me quickly unto Pluto's throne
As a new guest, the mighty host to greet !

IPHIGENIA.

Brother and sister in the firmament,
By day and night, who give fair light to man,
Yet dare not light the dead, oh ! great ones, help !
Thou lov'st thy gracious brother, O Diana,
More than thine offerings from heaven and earth,
And turnest ever thy pure maiden face,
After his glorious light with yearning quiet.
Let not my only new-found brother, still
In the dark frenzy of delirium, rave !
And if it be thy thought to keep me here
No longer 'gainst my will, and give to him
Through me, and me through him, thy blessed help ;
Oh ! loose him from the bands of this dread curse,
That precious time of rescue go not by.

PYLADES.

See'st thou us ? See'st thou this sanctuary ?
And this clear light, which lighteth not the dead ?
Of sister and of friend feel'st thou the arm
Strongly supporting thee, who livest still ?
Feel us, and prove we are not empty shades !

Listen to what I say, and understand !
Collect thyself ! Each moment now is dear ;
And our return hangs by a slender thread,
Spun for us by a favourable Fate.

ORESTES (*to Iphigenia*).

O, for the first time, let me with free heart
Experience purē joy in thy dear arms !
Ye gods, who with your great o'ermastering strength,
Spread o'er the sky your dark, self-wasting clouds,
And mercifully the long-wished-for rain,
'Mid voice of thunder, and 'mid howling wind,
Shake to the earth in wild downpouring streams,
Which to the gaze of awestruck, waiting men,
Disperse in blessing ; and their wondering fear
Turn into looks of joy and hymns of praise,
When in each leaf, made bright by drops of rain,
The sun, new seen, mirrors him many times,
And Iris, many-hued, with gentle hand
Removes the grey gauze of the ling'ring cloud :
O, let me, too, within my sister's arms,
Upon my friend's breast thankfully enjoy
And keep the good gift that ye give to me !
The curse is passing, my heart tells me so.
The Furies leave me now, I hear them go
To Tartarus, and behind them shut the doors
So awful, with a thunderous, heavy sound.

The earth exhales refreshing odours sweet,
And calleth on me o'er her plains to seek
For joyous life and glorious hero-deeds.

PYLADES.

Lose not the time which yet is left to us !
Oh ! let the wind that swells our sails bring first
The news of our full draught of joy to the high gods.
Come ! now we need swift counsel and resolve.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

IPHIGENIA.

WHEN the immortal ones
Choose them a child of earth,
Through many changes to bring,
And hasten they him
From joy unto sorrow,
And grief into joy,
Deep, soul-tossing changes :
Then prepare they for him,
Close by in the city,
Or on far-distant shore,
A calm-soulèd friend,
That in hours of need
The help may be near.
O, gods, bless our Pylades o'er and o'er,
And all that he shall ever undertake !
In battle a strong arm is he to youth,
Counsel and foresight to the venerable ;

Because his soul is calm, and thus possess'd
Of the unending holiness of peace.
And so he ruleth o'er the storm-toss'd soul,
Out of his own deep counsel and sure help.
He tore me from my brother, for I stood
Astonish'd more and more, and could not make
The happiness my own, holding him still
Within my arms, and so not taking in
The nearness of the danger o'er our heads.
Now are they gone to carry out their plan
Down to the sea ; there, hidden in a bay,
Lieth their ship ; wherein their comrades true
Await a sign. And in my mouth have they
A crafty answer placed, taught it to me,
That I may speak it to the king, if he
Send urgently the sacrifice to press.
Ah ! well I see I must submit myself
Now to be led and guided like a child.
To equivocate I never yet have learn'd ;
In truth, I know not how I *can* deceive.
O woe, woe, to all lies ; they make not free
The breast, as every word of truth must do.
They give us no repose, they cause distress
To him who thinks them out in secrecy ;
And, as an arrow shot forth wickedly,
Are they diverted by a god, and sent
Back to the archer's breast, with mortal blow.

Care after care swift passeth through my soul.
Perhaps anew th' Eumenides will seize
My brother, on the desecrated land,
Mounting the shore. Perhaps they have been seen?
Methinks I hear arm'd men. Some one is near.
Ah, my heart throbs, with grief my soul is fill'd ;
Now must I look upon the face of him
Whom, with a false word, I must pacify.

SCENE II.

Iphigenia. Arkas.

ARKAS.

PRIESTESS, make ready for the sacrifice,
The king expects it and the people wait.

IPHIGENIA.

My duty and thy word I would obey,
If an objection unforeseen did not
Between my will and its fulfilment come.

ARKAS.

What hindereth, then, the order of the king ?

IPHIGENIA.

An accident which no man can control.

ARKAS.

Tell it, that I may quickly let him know ;
For on the death of both his mind is set.

IPHIGENIA.

The holy gods have not decreed it thus.
The elder of these men beareth the guilt
Of mother's blood, which lately he hath shed.
The Furies follow ever on his steps ;
Yea, in the inner sanctuary feeleth he
Their gnawing dread, so that his presence there
Polluteth the pure fane. Unto the sea,
E'en now I hasten with my virgins down,
There in the fresh, bright waves to purify
The image of the goddess, and to enact
Mysterious rites of a most secret kind.
Our silent march must have no witnesses.

ARKAS.

This hindrance I with haste will show the king.
Begin thou not the sacred rites until
I bring the king's permission unto thee !

IPHIGENIA.

The priestess only, ordereth these things.

ARKAS.

An incident so strange the king should know.

IPHIGENIA.

His counsel nought could change more than his will.

ARKAS.

'Twere well to have the sanction of the king.

IPHIGENIA.

Enforce not what I cannot but refuse.

ARKAS.

Refuse not that which good and helpful is.

IPHIGENIA.

Do as thou wilt, tarry no longer here.

ARKAS.

Then will I to the camp and tell this news,
Quickly to thee his answer bringing back.
O that to him I might a message take,
Which would solve quickly all this mystery !
But faithful counsel thou regardest not.

IPHIGENIA.

I willingly have done all in my power.

ARKAS.

Change thy resolve e'en now, while there is time.

IPHIGENIA.

It is beyond my power, once for all.

ARKAS.

That thou mislik'st, thou call'st impossible.

IPHIGENIA.

And that thou wishest, thou call'st possible.

ARKAS.

Riskest thou everything so lightly then?

IPHIGENIA.

Unto the gods have I confided all.

ARKAS.

They give to man the power to save mankind.

IPHIGENIA.

But from their ordering outcometh all.

ARKAS.

O think again, it lieth in thy hands.

Nought but the king's mind sorely ill at ease,

Hastens the bitter death of these two men.

Long has the army been disused from that

Stern sacrifice, the bloody rite it loves.

Ah ! many a one, whom hard, relentless fate
Brought to a strange coast, have in their sad need
Felt what a godlike thing a friendly face
Seemeth unto the wanderer driven there.
O turn not from us thy sweet influence,
Thou easily can'st end thy work begun.
For where a healthy folk, teeming with life,
Courage and power, but with souls rude and wild,
Beareth the heavy load of human life,
O'erweigh'd by sad misgivings, swiftly there
In human hearts, Mercy in human form,
From heaven come, foundeth her kingdom meek.

IPHIGENIA.

Forbear, I pray, to agitate my soul,
Which thou can'st bend in no way to thy will !

ARKAS.

So long as there is time, no pains one spares
In repetition of a friendly wish.

IPHIGENIA.

In taking trouble thou giv'st pain to me,
And both are useless. Therefore leave me now.

ARKAS.

It is to these pains to which I look for help,
True friends are they, and well they counsel us.

IPHIGENIA.

With misery they tear my soul in twain,
But cannot alter once my firm resolve.

ARKAS.

Feeleth a pure soul such a strange distaste
For good gift offered by a noble heart?

IPHIGENIA.

Yes! if the king thinks thus to gain my heart
To a wrong deed, in place of gratitude.

ARKAS.

He who has no desire may lightly find
A good excuse. Now will I to the prince,
Telling him all that 'twixt us has pass'd here.
Remember ever in thy deepest soul
How nobly he has always treated thee,
E'en from thy coming, still unto this day.

SCENE III.

IPHIGENIA (*alone*).

BY this man's counsel do I feel myself
Give way at this unseasonable time.
The heart within me well nigh turns. I shudder!
For as the tide, swelling with rapid waves,

Covers the rocks which lie along the shore
Amidst the sand, so was my inmost soul
O'erwhelmèd with a stream of sudden joy.
Within my arms I held th' impossible.
Again a cloud seem'd to o'ershadow me,
To lift me up from earth,—in gentle sleep
To rock me ; sleep like that the goddess gave
When with her saving powerful arm she took me.
With all-engrossing power Orestes seized me,
But to Pylades' counsel gave I heed,
My soul strove onward only for their sakes.
And as the mariner released looks back
To the desert island gladly from his ship,
Just so lay Tauris far behind me then.
But now the calm voice of the faithful man
Awaken'd me, and brought it strongly home,
How that behind me here I must leave friends.
Deceit seems doubly hateful to my soul.
O soul, be calm ! so soon art thou grown weak ?
So soon begin'st to doubt ! Now must thou leave
The ground secure of thy calm solitude ;
Again embark'd, the rough waves toss thy skiff.
In vague anxiety thou dost misjudge
Thyself and all the world besides.

SCENE IV.

Pylades. Iphigenia.

PYLADES.

WHERE is she, that with swift words I may
bring
The joyful message of our sure escape.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou seest me full of care and expectation
Of the sure comfort thou dost promise me.

PYLADES.

Thy brother is quite cured ; the rocky shore
Of the unconsecrated ground and sand,
Mid joyous intercourse our feet betrod.
The Temple lay behind us, nought we felt.
Bright and yet brighter shone the beauteous light
Of youth around his head so rich with curls.
His eyes beam'd luminous with courageous hope,
His free heart gave itself to all the joy,
To all the pleasure, thee his helper true,
And me his friend, to save from threatening death.

IPHIGENIA.

May'st thou be blessed ! Oh, that from thy lips,

Which unto me such gladdening news have brought,
The sounds of pain and sorrow ne'er may fall !

PYLADES.

More than this I bring, for when appeareth joy,
He comes like to a prince, with goodly train.
Our comrades we have found, who in the bay
Where they had hid the ship sat waiting sad.
But when they saw Orestes, up they sprang
Shouting, and praying him most earnestly
To hasten the departure from this coast.
Longingly reach'd each hand unto the oar,
A gentle land breeze murmur'd o'er the sea,
A hopeful omen, noted of them all.
So let us hasten ; lead me to the fane,
There give me entrance to the sanctuary,
Let me with reverence bear the dear desire
Of all our hearts. For I am strong enough
Alone to bear Diana's image hence
On well-train'd shoulders. Come. Ah ! how I long
After the precious and much looked-for load.

[During the last words, he goes towards the temple, without noticing that Iphigenia does not follow ; at last he turns round.]

Thou stand'st and ling'rest ; tell me,—thou art
silent !

Thou seem'st confused, presents itself to thee

A fresh objection to our happiness?
Speak then! hast thou sent truly to the king
The prudent message which we left with thee?

IPHIGENIA.

I have, beloved youth, yet thou wilt chide.
Thy face alone reproves me silently.
A courier from the king has been, and as
Thou putt'd'st in my mouth, thus answer'd I.
He seem'd surprised, and urgently desired
To mention the strange rite unto the king,
And then to bring his sanction unto me,
And now I here await his swift return.

PYLADES.

Woe unto us! now danger sweeps anew
Around our brows! Wherefore then hast thou not
Wisely enwrapp'd thee in thy priestly right?

IPHIGENIA.

I ne'er have lent it to deception's use.

PYLADES.

Thus, O pure soul, wilt thou thyself and us
Bring to destruction. Wherefore thought I not
Of this occasion, and instructed thee
How from this trouble thou should'st find escape.

IPHIGENIA.

Chide me alone : the guilt is mine. I know it,
Yet otherwise I could not meet the man
Who earnestly with reason ask'd of me
That which I could but give him as a right.

PYLADES.

This looketh very dangerous for us,
Yet to despair or rashness let us not
Give way, and hasten so our own betrayal.
Wait calmly for the messenger's return,
And then stand firm, let him bring what he will !
For to the priestess belongs precedence
Over these secret rites, not to the king.
And if he fain would see the stranger man,
Who in a violent frenzy is enwrapp'd,
Refuse it him, feigning to keep them both
Carefully guarded in the sanctuary.
" Then give us breathing time, with haste to flee,
Bearing the holy stolen treasure hence,
Far from this wild, uncivilizèd coast."
Apollo sendeth us the best of signs,
And ere the sacred terms we have fulfill'd,
Godlike already he makes good his word.
Heal'd is Orestes,—free ! With him released,
Carry us sweetly hence, O gentle winds,
Unto the rocky isle where dwells the god !

Then to Mycenæ that it may revive ;
That, from the ashes of the extinguish'd race,
The household gods may joyful raise themselves,
And gladdening fires may light the dwelling-place !
Thy hand shall first cast incense unto them
From out of rich-wrought golden vessels strewn.
Over all troubles shedd'st thou health and life.
Remov'st the curse, thy brother newly deck'st
With glory in the freshness of his youth.

IPHIGENIA.

When upon thee I look, belovèd youth,
It is as when the flower opens forth
Unto the sun. Thus openeth my soul,
Comforted by the sunbeams of thy words
Unto the sweet consoler. Without price
Are of a present friend the loving words,
Whose heavenly power the lonely one so needs,
And still keeps drinking in. For in the breast
Locked up, great thoughts and high resolves
Ripen but slowly. To perfection soon
The presence of the loved one bringeth them.

PYLADES.

Farewell ! Now will I haste to calm our friends
Who lie there anxiously awaiting me ;
Quickly will I return, and listen here,

Hidden behind this rock, to wait thy sign.—
What meditatest thou? There sweeps across
Thy forehead pure a train of calm, sad thoughts.

IPHIGENIA.

I pray thee, pardon me! for, as light clouds
Before the sun, there passeth o'er my soul
Slight care and anxious fear.

PYLADES.

O fear thou not!

Deceitfully hath fear with danger formed
A strict alliance,—hand in hand they go.

IPHIGENIA.

A noble care it is which troubleth me!
How shall I artfully deceive and rob
The king who has been to me like a father?

PYLADES.

Thou fliest from the slayer of thy brother.

IPHIGENIA.

He is the same who has been good to me!

PYLADES.

What need exacts is not ingratitude.

IPHIGENIA.

That is it ever, though excused by need.

PYLADES.

Before both gods and men, to thee excused.

IPHIGENIA.

Yet my own heart cannot content itself.

PYLADES.

Too rigid claims upon ourselves betray
A secret pride.

IPHIGENIA.

I reason not, but feel.

PYLADES.

If rightly thou would'st act, consult thy heart.

IPHIGENIA.

A pure heart only can know perfect peace.

PYLADES.

Pure in the temple hast thou kept thyself.
Life teaches us more leniently to feel
Both for ourselves and others ; thou learn'st it now ;
So strangely fashioned is this human race,
So wondrously united and entwined,—

That no one knows to keep himself quite pure
In his relations with his fellow men.
We are not call'd upon to judge ourselves ;
But to note well his steps and to press on,
Is a man's first and most important care.
For seldom judgeth he aright the past ;
Nor knows he how to value this day's deeds.

IPHIGENIA.

Strongly persuad'st thou me to think with thee.

PYLADES.

Needs it persuasion where there is no choice ?
To save thyself, thy brother and a friend,
But one way is there ; can there be a doubt,
If we should hesitate to follow it ?

IPHIGENIA.

O let me linger ! For thyself would'st ne'er
Do calmly such a wrong to any man,
To whom for kindness thou did'st feel beholden.

PYLADES.

If we to Hades fall, must thou await
Reproach *more* keen, driving thee to despair.
That thou art not unto affliction used
Is lightly seen, in that a few false words

Thou darest not offer, so to ward away
A trouble beyond aught that thou hast known.

IPHIGENIA.

O that my breast enwrapp'd a manly heart,
Which, if it entertains a bold design,
Shuts itself up from every other voice !

PYLADES.

Thou griev'st thyself for nought ; the brazen hand
Of need commands, and her stern hint is law,
To which e'en gods must bow. Silently rules
Th' uncounsell'd sister of unbending fate.
The burden laid on thee by her, that bear !
Do what she bids ! Thou know'st what happens else.
Soon I return, and from thy holy hand
Will of our safety, bear the precious seal.

SCENE V.

IPHIGENIA (*alone*).

I MUST go with him, for those dear to me
See I in pressing danger, and, ah woe !
My own fate makes me sad and sick at heart :
Why can I not retain the calm, sweet hope

Which in my solitude I so enjoy'd !
Must then the curse for ever move our hearts,
Shall our race never more uplift its head
With blessing crown'd afresh ?—All things have end !
The greatest happiness, life's most glorious strength,
Abates itself at last ; why not the curse ?
Carried away, far from the direful fate
Of our great house, and kept in safety here,
Have I then vainly hoped that I might cleanse
In time to come the deep-polluted house,
Entering with my pure heart and holy hands !
Scarce is my brother given to my embrace
Quickly and strangely heal'd from his great curse,
Scarce is disclosed the much desired ship
To bear me hence unto my native land,
Than with her brazen hands Necessity
Unfeeling lays on me a double load :
To steal the sacred, honour'd image hence,
Which to my care was trusted, and to deceive
The man to whom I owe my life and joy of life.
O that my soul felt not at last the germs
Of hatred, springing from my Titan blood,
Tearing my tender breast like vultures' claws,
Deep-rooted hatred of the ancient gods.
To you, immortals of Olympus height !
Save me, and guard your image in my soul.

* * * * *

Within my ears soundeth the ancient song,—
I had forgotten it, and willingly,—
The song the Fates sang shivering, what time
Fell from Jove's golden table Tantalus.
They sided with their noble friend, and fill'd
With anger was their breast, and terrible their song.
When we were little children the nurse sang it
To me, Orestes, and Electra, and
Thereon I deeply pondered.

* * * *

The human race feareth,
The might of the gods ;
Who hold the dominion,
In hands everlasting,
For their pleasure they know
To employ men of earth.

And he whom they favour
Should fear them the more,
On far heights and' clouds
Are seats placed for feasting
Round tables of gold.

When contest ariseth
O'erhurl'd are the guests,
Reviled and disgrac'd
In depth of black night,
Fast bound in the dimness

Awaiting in vain,
A judgment of justice.

Still remain the immortals
At banquets eternal,
Round tables of gold.
From mountain to mountain
They stride, and to them
Out the deep, dread abyss,
Ascendeth the breath
Of Titans nigh stifled,
Like to light hazy cloud
Of smoke from burnt offering.

Thus turn the all-rulers
Their aspect benign,
From whole races of men ;
And avoid in the grandsons
Of one once belovèd,
To see silently speaking
Their ancestor's image.

And thus sang the Parcæ,
Banish'd Tantalus hearken'd,
Deep down in his cave,
To the song. And he thinks
On his children and grandchildren,
Shaking his head.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

Arkas. Thoas.

ARKAS.

I AM in deep perplexity and doubt,
'Gainst whom my strong suspicions to direct.
Can it the prisoners be who secretly
Meditate their flight? Or is't the priestess
Who helpeth them? The rumour ever grows,
How that the ship which brought the strangers here
Lies hidden even now within a bay.
And this man's madness, and this lustral rite,
The sacred pretexts of this dallying, call
Loudly for careful watching and distrust.

THOAS.

See that the priestess quickly hither comes!
Go swiftly, carefully to search the coast,

Straight from the headland to Diana's grove.
Have care none enter in the sacred doors,
Lay watchful ambush round, and seize the men
There, where thou find'st them, keep them, see to it.

SCENE II.

THOAS (*alone*).

TERRIBLY grows the anger in my breast,
First 'gainst the woman whom I thought so
pure,
Next 'gainst myself, who have her thus prepared
For falsehood by my care and kind entreaty.
To servitude man soon becometh used,
And quickly learns obedience to the mind
Of him who takes from him his liberty.
Ah ! had she fallen in the bloody hands
Of those who came before me, had she 'scaped
Their pious anger ; happy had she been,
To save herself alone, had gratefully
Received her fate, and spill'd the stranger blood
Before the altar, calling that her duty,
Which was necessity. But now my benefits
Wake in her breast but insolent desire.
I vainly hoped to lift her to my throne,
But she hath chosen for herself her lot.

She won my heart by flattery, and now
Since that I this withstand, she has recourse
To fraud and artifice, and all my love
Seemeth to her but as her vested right.

SCENE III.

Iphigenia. Thoas.

IPHIGENIA.

THOU callest me, what is it brings thee here?

THOAS.

Thou dost delay the sacrifice ! Wherefore ?

IPHIGENIA.

I have explain'd all clearly unto Arkas.

THOAS.

From thee more fully I would learn the cause.

IPHIGENIA.

The goddess for reflection gives thee time.

THOAS.

Well pleasing to thee seemeth this delay.

IPHIGENIA.

With fierce resolve thus hardening thy heart,

Thou shouldest not come hither unto me !
The king who seeks to do inhuman deeds
Finds hirelings e'er who for reward and praise
Greedily seize a half share of the guilt,
And he himself remaineth undefiled.
The king plans death wrapp'd in a gloomy cloud,
His messengers flash swift destruction down
Upon the heads of those without defence.
But he amidst his heights moves godlike on,
Through the dread storm untouched by all their prayers.

THOAS.

A wild hymn breaks from out the hallow'd lips.

IPHIGENIA.

Not priestess, only Agamemnon's child.
The word of the unknown one honoured'st thou,
The princess wilt thou proudly order ? No !
From my youth up obedience have I learn'd,
First to my parents, then to a higher power,
And in that path my soul has e'er been fill'd
With sweetest freedom ; but to such cruel words,
The harsh outcomings of a man's hard heart,
I learn, nor there, nor here, to yield my will.

THOAS.

An ancient law commandeth thee, not I.

IPHIGENIA.

Eager we seize upon a law that serves
As weapon for our passionate desire.
Another law of more antiquity
Now bids me to withstand thee—the command
By which each stranger is a sacred trust.

THOAS.

The strangers' safety seemeth to concern
Thee nearly ! In thy sympathy with them
Thou dost forget the precept wisdom gives :
Not to provoke the powerful to wrath.

IPHIGENIA.

Speak I, or keep I silent, well thou know'st
What in my heart is now, and e'er shall be.
Does not the memory of a like doom
Open the harden'd heart to pitying thoughts ?
How much more mine, in them I see myself.
Before the altar I have also knelt,
And there the early, awful doom enwrapp'd
The kneeling maiden. Flash'd the knife on high
To pierce the bosom throbbing with full life.
A dizzy horror overwhelm'd my soul,
My eyes grew dim—awaking I was saved . . .
Do we not owe it to the unfortunate
To pay to them whene'er occasion is

The gifts vouchsafed us by the holy gods?
Thou know'st 'tis so. Thou knowest me,
And yet thou would'st subdue me to thy will.

THOAS.

Obey thy sacred duties, not thy lord.

IPHIGENIA.

Enough ! make not excuse for power that joys
In weakness of a woman's heart to work.
My spirit is as free-born as a man's.
Stood Agamemnon's son before thy face,
And thou would'st ask that which becomes him not,
His sword well knoweth to defend the rights
Humanity dictates. I have but words,
And it becomes a noble-hearted man
To honour well the words from woman's lips.

THOAS.

More than a brother's sword I honour them.

IPHIGENIA.

I know the chance of arms is changeable,
No prudent warrior underrates his foe.
But nature leaves not weak ones without help
'Gainst roughness and disdain ; succour she gives
In artifice, and teaches them deceit,
Eluding and evading hard commands.

THOAS.

But foresight 'gainst deception arms itself.

IPHIGENIA.

And a pure soul needs no deceptive means.

THOAS.

Speak not incautiously of thine own part.

IPHIGENIA.

O could'st thou see the struggle in my soul
To drive away at its first shock the fate
Which threatens into sin to draw me down.
Now stand I weaponless before thee here?
Prayer, loveliest branch, in woman's hand more strong
Than sword or any weapon thou throw'st back.
What is now left me to defend my love
Of freedom ; on the goddess will I call
To work a miracle in my behalf.
Within my soul's depths is there *no* power left ?

THOAS.

The fate of the two strangers as it seems
Causeth thee deep concern ! Speak, who are they
For whom thy soul pleadeth so mightily ?

IPHIGENIA.

They are,—they seem,—for Greeks I take them.

THOAS.

Thy countrymen? and have they then renew'd
The beauteous picture of return to Greece?

IPHIGENIA (*after a silence*).

Has then the man to wondrous hero-deeds
Alone the right? Presseth to glorious acts
He only with the mighty hero breast?
What is it men call great? What then is it
That lifts his soul with tremor as he tells
Of doubtful deeds done in days long gone by,
That all men deem'd unlikely of success.
Shall he alone be praised, who in the night
Steals on the army of the enemy,
And like a raging flame doth seize upon
The sleeping and the waking, and at last
Escapes from the awaken'd on the foeman's horse
And then rides off, laden with booty rare?
He only, who despising paths secure,
Goes boldly roving over mountains high
And forests dark, to cleanse the land around
Of robbers? Is there nothing left for us?
Must gentle woman wrong her inborn sense
Of modesty, and strength 'gainst strength oppose,
As Amazons do rob you of your right of swords,
Revening their oppression with your blood!
Within my heart I, too, conceive bold deeds,

From great reproaches I shall not escape,
And heavier evil if they go amiss
Yet there, I leave it all to thy decree.
. . . "If thou art true, as thou art said to be,
Show it by thy protection, and through me
Glorify thou the truth."—Hearken, O king,
. . . A secret scheme is being carried out,
Yea, vainly for the prisoners may'st thou ask,
They are away, far hence, and seek their friends
Who on the shore await them with the ship.
The elder whom the curse had seized upon
But now has left—he is Orestes,
My brother, and the younger one his friend,
His trusted friend from youth, by name Pylades.
Hither from Delphi sendeth them Apollo,
With his most dread command to take away
The image of Diana, and to him
To bring the sister, which command fulfill'd
Unto Orestes freedom giveth he
From following of the dread Eumenides
And from the guilty stain of mother's blood.
Now both of us, the last remaining ones
Of Tantalus' house, are in thy power :
Destroy us—if thou durst !

THOAS.

And thinkest thou
That the rough Scythian king, the barbarous man,

Will hear the voice of truth and kindness,
Which Atreus hearken'd not.

IPHIGENIA.

All men hear it,
Born in whatever clime, in whom the spring
Of life unhindered flows in purity. . . .
Art silent? say, what fate plann'st thou for me;
Thus musing deep within thy soul, O king?
Is it destruction? Then destroy me first!
For now I see that unto us no safety
Is longer open; since I wilfully
Have thrown in fearful peril those I love:
Ah, I must see them bound before my eyes!
How to my brother can I bid farewell,
For I have murder'd him. Never again
To his belovèd eyes can I lift mine.

THOAS.

Thus cunningly have these deceivers plann'd
To throw a net of lies around the head
Of her so long kept hidden from the world;
And who is willing to believe fulfilment
Of her dearest wish.

IPHIGENIA.

Nay, O king, not so!
I might be led away, but these men are

Too true to tell me wrong. If false thou find'st them,
Then let them perish, and reject me too ;
Punish my folly by my banishment
Unto the sad coast of some rocky isle.
But if instead this man is of a truth
My brother so beloved, so long pray'd for,
Then, oh, release us, be unto us both,
As thou hast been to me, a faithful friend.
My father fell by his wife's wickedness,
And she died by her son ; thus the last hope
Of Atreus' house rests upon him alone.
Let me with my pure heart, with my pure hands,
Go home with him, and purify our house.
Yes ; thou wilt keep thy word, that if the way
Of safe return to Greece were found for me,
That thou would'st let me go ; now see it come.
A king gives not his word as other men,
Only to lay it by, that he may close
The mouths of those who pray him for a while.
Nor does he give his word for an event
He hopes may never come. He feels his power
When to the longing ones he bringeth joy.

THOAS.

As fire indignantly restrains itself
'Gainst water in the conflict, hissing still
And striving to defeat its enemy ;

So in my bosom is restrain'd the wrath
Awakened by the words thou utt'rest now.

IPHIGENIA.

O, let thy mercy, like the holy light
Proceeding calmly from the altar crown'd
With hymns of praise and joy, shine down on me.

THOAS.

How often has that sweet voice soften'd me !

IPHIGENIA.

O, give me then thy hand, in sign of peace !

THOAS.

Thou askest much of me for quick response.

IPHIGENIA.

To do a good deed needeth no long thought.

THOAS.

Yea, much, for of good deeds may evil spring.

IPHIGENIA.

Good deeds by hesitation turn to ill.
Weigh not what follows, act as prompts thy heart.

SCENE IV.

Orestes (armed). Iphigenia. Thoas.

ORESTES (*turning to the back of the scene*).

DOUBLE your forces, keep them ready there
But a few moments more of holding back !
Let not the men retreat, but guard the way
For me and for my sister to the ship.

[*Turning to Iphigenia, without seeing the king.*

Quick ! we are betray'd. Short time is left for flight.

[*He sees the king.*

THOAS (*putting his hand on his sword*).

Unpunish'd, no man in my presence bears
His sword unsheathèd !

IPHIGENIA.

Desecrate ye not
The holy temple by your murderous wrath.
Order thy people that in bounds they keep.
Obey the priestess, listen to the sister.

ORESTES.

Tell me, who is this man that threatens us ?

IPHIGENIA.

Honour in him the king, my second father.

Pardon me, brother, for my childish heart
Hath placed our fate entirely in his hands.
I have confess'd your scheme, and so my soul
Is thus preserved from all untruthfulness.

ORESTES.

Will he vouchsafe to us a safe return ?

IPHIGENIA.

Thy flashing sword forbids me to reply.

ORESTES (*sheathing his sword*).

Speak then ! Behold, your bidding is obey'd !

SCENE V.

*The Same. Pylades, behind him Arkas, both with
drawn swords.*

PYLADES.

TARRY no more, our men are gathering
strength

For one last effort. Down unto the shore,
Quietly and slowly, have they made retreat.
. . . What conference of princes find I here ?
Surely I stand in presence of the king !

ARKAS.

Majestic as beseemeth thee, O king,

Stand'st thou before the foe. Yea, in such wise
Be all such boldness punish'd. Yield
And fail their followers, and their ship is ours.
One word from thee, by flames it is consumed.

THOAS.

Go ; bid my people wait and keep a truce,
Let no man harm the men while we consult.
[*Arkas goes out.*

ORESTES.

To this do I agree. Go, faithful friend,
Assemble closely all those left to us,
And calmly wait what end the gods prepare
To follow on our deeds. [*Pylades retires.*

SCENE VI.

Iphigenia. Thoas. Orestes.

IPHIGENIA.

ERE you begin to speak, free me from fear ;
Sharp difference do I foresee, O king,
If thou the voice of justice heark'nest not ;
And if thou, brother, keep'st not stern command
Over the rashness of hot-blooded youth.

THOAS.

My anger I control as it beseems
The elder. Answer me now, what proof
Giv'st thou, that thou art Agamemnon's son
And Iphigenia's brother?

ORESTES.

Here is the sword
With which he slew brave warriors of Troy ;
This took I from his murderer, and pray'd
Th' immortals unto me to give the might,
The courage, and the fortune, which belong'd
Unto the noble king, and to vouchsafe
To me a happier death. Now choose thee one
From out the nobles of thy host, that he
May in death struggle try 'gainst me his strength.
Where'er earth fostereth the hero-race
Is to no stranger this request denied.

THOAS.

This privilege to strangers ne'er has been
Accorded by old customs of this land.

ORESTES.

Begin new customs, then, 'twixt thee and me.
In imitation would the whole land hail
Their leader's noble action as a law.
So for our freedom only fight I not,

Let me, the stranger, for all strangers give
Thee battle. Fall I, then do they and I
Together fall. If fortune favours me,
And victory is mine, let no man step
Upon this coast but shall be met forthwith
By looks of kindness, and help-giving love,
And sent consoled upon his wish'd-for way.

THOAS.

O, glorious youth, right worthy seemest thou
Of the great ancestors thou callest thine.
Among my followers count I many a brave
And noble man. Yet, in despite my years,
I still against the enemy will stand,
I wait to try the chance of arms with thee.

IPHIGENIA.

In no wise! Of this bloody proof, O king,
There is no need. Grasp not thy sword. O, think
Of me, and of my fate. Combats well won
Immortalize a man. If he should fall,
By song his fame is ever carried down.
Only the bitter tears which endlessly
Weepeth the woman left alone to live
And grieve, are worthy no remembering.
The poet singeth not of all the days
And nights she spendeth weeping wearily,

Wherein the meek soul calleth back in vain
The dear one who departed in such haste,
She only left to waste away with grief.
I, too, have felt a fear and need to watch,
Lest by deception spoilers should bear me
From my safe shelter into slavery.
With circumspection have I question'd them,
Possess'd myself of every circumstance,
Demanded certain proofs; and now my heart
Is sure beyond a doubt that all is true.
See here, on his right hand, I find the mark
As of three stars, which in his hour of birth,
Were found there; and the priest gave prophesy
That this sign boded forth some dreadful deed
Which by this hand should be accomplishèd.
This scar cleaving his brow gives double proof;
Electra carried him when yet a babe;
And careless, wild, as maidens of her years
Are wont to be, she let her brother fall,
Thus striking 'gainst a tripod violently—
Yes, it is he himself.—Shall I yet cite
His likeness to our father; or, again,
The inward witness of my joyful heart
To give thee further proofs?

THOAS.

And should thy words be true beyond a doubt,

And if my anger I control within
My breast, yet can there be no peace ; but still
'Tis arms that must decide betwixt us two.
They came, thou hast it said, to steal away
The holy image of our goddess.
Think'st thou, indeed, that this shall be allow'd ?
The Greeks oft cast their longing eyes upon
The far-off treasures of the men they call
Uncivilized. Their golden fleece, their steeds,
Their beauteous maidens. Power and artifice
Bring them not ever safely back to Greece,
Bearing the treasures they have snatched from far.

ORESTES.

O king, let not the image sunder us.
Now do we see the error which a god
Threw like a blinding veil around our heads,
When he hath sent us wandering to this land.
For counsel pray'd I him, and liberty
From presence of the Furies. And he spake :
" If thou the sister who, against her will,
Dwells in the temple on the Taurian coast
Bringest to Greece, so shall the curse be loosed."
We thus interpreted Apollo's sister
To be the sister spoken of at Delphi.
But 'twas not so, it was thyself he meant.
Now broken are thy chains, unto thine own

Here art thou given back, thou holy one.
By thy love calmed, to health I was restored.
In thine arms, for the last time, did I feel
The curse seize on me with its horrid clutch,
Chilling with terror all my being through,
Then glided like a serpent into hell.
New joy have I through thee of day's sweet
light.

Beauteous and full of glory seemeth now
Diana's wise decree. Indeed thou art
E'en as the image, in possessing which
Lieth the fate immutably decreed
Unto the city, where it is conceal'd.
Diana, holy goddess, bore thee here,
And kept thee safe, protectress of our house,
Guarded in holy stillness. Now to be
Redeemer of our house, and blessing sweet
Unto thy brother, and all dear to thee.
For all deliverance that the earth could give
Seemed lost to us, till thou recovered'st all.
O king, let peaceful thoughts direct thy soul,
Hinder no more that Iphigenia bring
New consecration to our father's house.
Give the redeemed abode once more to me,
And place the ancient crown upon my head.
Requite the blessing which she brought to thee,
And make me happy in my prior right.

Let force and stratagem, which bring to men
Their highest fame, become abash'd and low
Before the truthfulness of this great soul.
Let the pure childlike trust she placed in thee,
A noble man, receive its just reward.

IPHIGENIA.

Think on thy promise, and allow thyself
To be persuaded by these words which flow
From out a faithful mouth. Look on us then—
Thou hast not oft an opportunity
Of giving joy by such a noble deed ;
Thou canst not say us nay, vouchsafe the word
Which gives to us our freedom.

THOAS.

Go ye, then.

IPHIGENIA.

Not so, my king, I will not part from thee
Without thy blessing, and against thy will.
Ah, curse us not, but let a friendly bond
Of hospitality live 'twixt our land and thine,
Thus shall the hope of seeing thee again
Be not removed from us. Honour'd and dear
As was my father to me, so art thou ;
And thus for ever will I think of thee.
The least of all thy subjects e'er shall bring

Back to my ear the dear tones of the voice,
Wherein I now am used to hear thee speak ;
And if I see the meanest in the garb
Of Tauris, I will treat him as a god.
With my own hands will I prepare his couch,
Lead him unto a seat beside the fire,
And ask him eagerly of thee and thine.
. . . O, may the gods requite thee thy good deeds,
And give thy mercy its deserved reward.
Farewell ! Ah, turn thy face on us, and give
To us a gentle word of parting.
For gently then the wind will swell our sails,
And then from out our eyes the tears will flow
More soothingly. Farewell ! give into mine
Thy right hand as a pledge of friendship true.

THOAS.

Farewell !

GOETHE

IPHIGENIA

IN

TAURIS.



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